

Ethnology of Pukapuka

By ERNEST AND PEARL BEAGLEHOLE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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124 The field work of which this monograph is a partial report was carried out on a Bishop Museum fellowship. For permission to visit Pukapuka we have to thank Judge Hugh F. Ayson, Resident Commissioner, Cook Islands. The resident agent and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Geoffrey Henry, and their family were continually generous and hospitable to us. We are especially indebted to them for acting as interpreters and for giving much time to what must often have seemed unrewarding labor. To Robert Dean Frisbie, who placed at our disposal his wide knowledge of fishing and astronomy, we also owe a debt of gratitude. We are under obligation to botanists of Bishop Museum staff for identification of plant specimens and to Mr. D'Alte Welch for shell identifications. Mr. Adrian Digby, Assistant Keeper, Department of Oriental Antiquities and of Ethnography, British Museum, London, very kindly forwarded to us a detailed description and photograph of Gill's "soul trap". In working up the material we have drawn freely on the knowledge and technical experience of Te Rangi Hiroa (Dr. P. H. Buck), to whom we owe our first introduction to the field of Polynesian ethnology.

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121 Scientific work on Pukapuka has heretofore been limited to two brief accounts by Gill (10, 13)*, a paper by Hutchin (18), manuscript notes of a short visit to the atoll by Bryan (5), and a brief account by Macgregor (20) based on a three-day visit to the island in April 1933. The work of Gill and Hutchin is slight and of no great value. Bryan's notes gave us a preliminary orientation and Macgregor generously placed at our disposal before we left Honolulu a manuscript copy of his paper on Pukapuka. We were thus able to check Macgregor's material in the field, and have not considered it necessary to refer to his work on every occasion where his observations are at variance with ours.

121 In the field, Ernest Beaglehole was especially responsible for collecting material on social and economic organization, religion, traditional history, and material culture; Pearl Beaglehole for string figures, material on children, intimate aspects of family and domestic life, the household census, stories, and other textual material. The bulk of the manuscript was written by Ernest Beaglehole.

128 Certain records on which this study is based are filed in the library of Bernice P. Bishop Museum: lists of place names, names of land divisions, household lots and talo gardens, statistical records, native texts and notes.

* Numbers in parentheses refer to *Liberation Cited*, p. 415.

177 more personal aspects particularly is frowned upon by elders in open but tacitly approved in fact. In contact with white people the Pukapukans always speak and act as if they heartily believed and followed the missionary code. 527 It took us many months to persuade them that we did not care to pass judgment upon what they thought and did but that what really interested us 797 was to find out what these acts and thoughts were. As informants gained 123 confidence in us, they dropped their usual attitude of "being on their best 609 behavior" when we were present and were much more natural and free.

This attitude of confidence was sufficient for us to gain insight into some of the more implicit phases of Pukapukan life, but even at the end of our stay we were baffled in our attempts to penetrate far below the surface. The cultural veneer of mid-Victorian morality is sufficiently deep to withstand any penetration save that based on long years of patient probing.

177 White contact has affected least of all the economic life and the manufacture of native articles. Though many Pukapukans today live in coral 797 line houses in the permanent villages, native houses still predominate, especially in the copra-making villages. The people wear European-clothes; the 291 women wear dresses, the men trousers and, when not working, shirts as well. 312 The use of native clothing had almost disappeared by 1934. Because there has been little money available to buy fresh clothes some women now eke out the life of old rags by wearing coconut-leaf kilts over these during working hours. Boys under 12 or 13 years of age go naked for the most part, reserving pants and shirts for school and church wear. Girls wear dresses from the tenderest age onward. Presumably this tendency would be reversed if the first missionaries had been women.

177 Every household is supplied with knives, usually a cooking pot, tins as drinking utensils, and mosquito nets. Fishermen commonly use iron fish- 411 hooks but they still largely retain the use of native fishlines. Native plank canoes, lashed with sennit, are in common use, the several flat-bottomed 229 European boats being used only for transport of copra and cargo over the 381 reef. Beyond these obvious changes, economic life functions today largely according to old patterns. The few items that could not be made for the Bishop Museum collection consisted mainly of plaited garments apparently infrequently worn in the old days.

LIMITATIONS OF MATERIAL

124 Data on the more personal and implicit aspects of the culture were obtained from special informants with whom we had built up a confidential 127 friendship, usually without the medium of an interpreter. The material on formal social life, save where it relates to the old-time governing authorities, to the powers of the chiefs and elders, or to the general tapus surrounding the chiefs, is reasonably reliable. Questioning of informants has been sup-

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plemented by an analysis of texts. The texts themselves, of which only a few examples are given in this monograph, and the vocabulary have been checked and rechecked with informants and may be taken as representing with fair accuracy the Pukapukan dialect. Data on economic life and the material culture are reliable. The material on Pukapukan religion and its interrelations with other aspects of the culture, particularly with economic and social life, is definitely weak and represents a type of historical reconstruction based on informants' accounts supplemented by textual material. None of the informants were living during the days when Pukapukan religion actually functioned.

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This study of Pukapukan culture is, in the main, a presentation of the more formal patterns of behavior which have been abstracted from the total culture by ourselves or our informants. It is likely that the contents of this monograph, if imputed to one or all of our informants, would in no sense be recognized by him as significant formulations of all his cultural experience. We believe he would recognize that the majority of the statements contained herein hold true in one sense or another for some aspect of his experience, and it is this belief and the fact that the formal patterns of Pukapukan society configure fairly well with the patterns of other Polynesian communities that are the sole guarantee of the measure of truth in the generalizations presented.

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The ideas and action patterns grouped together under the title of Pukapukan ethnology would have endlessly different meanings for the various informants. It is just these personal valuations, symbolisms, and implications which the cultural set-up of modern Pukapuka makes so difficult to annotate and which attest to the continued vitality of Pukapukan culture as a functional entity. Much of Pukapukan culture as here presented is the peculiar property of but few individuals in Pukapuka today. The imprint of informants' personalities is contained in all the information so freely imparted, but it is woven into the context of the information in a fashion that defies analysis, though it is none the less real. This is most striking in the realm of religion or in the chants. Full participation in the latter as a cultural value is probably limited to no more than a few individuals of the 600 odd Pukapukans living on the atoll today. The remainder have vague or ill-defined ideas about the meanings of obscure passages in the chants, though any vigorous-minded Pukapukan will, on challenge, make up immediate rationalizations to cover his own lack of authentic understanding. This in no way vitiates the value of these chants as an aid to the recapture of old-time customs. These customs and symbolisms are preserved in them, waiting only for the analyst's attention.

The following pages attempt to work out the main forms of Pukapukan culture, to hint at certain time sequences, and to indicate a few geographical

NOTES ON THE ETHNOLOGY OF PUKAPUKA

By

GORDON MACGREGOR

INTRODUCTION

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

114 The present notes on Pukapuka are based on field observations
 ● 127 which I made during the three-day visit of the Templeton Crocker Expedition to the island in April 1933, on a study of artifacts in Bernice P. Bishop Museum, and on ethnological information about the island found in literature.

[124] During the visit I remained ashore as the guest of Mr. Geoffrey Henry, Resident Agent, who extended to the party all the courtesy and hospitality for which the South Seas are noted and devoted all his time to us, explaining what he could of Pukapukan customs, guiding us to places of interest, and arranging dances and wrestling exhibitions. I am deeply grateful to him for the ethnological information and the time he devoted to interpreting for me while I questioned native informants. Appreciation and thanks are due also to the chiefs and people of Pukapuka for ethnological specimens.

I am particularly indebted to Mr. Templeton Crocker for his generous invitation to accompany the expedition, for his notes and measurements of the large sailing canoe and the native names of the parts of bonito hooks, and for permission to use the excellent drawings and photographs made by Mr. Toshio Asaeda.

LANGUAGE

194 The Pukapuka dialect has five vowels, *a, e, i, o, u*, and nine consonants, *k, l, m, n, ng, p, t, v*, and *w*. The *h* is dropped but is represented in speech by the glottal closure, as in the Mangaian dialect and two Maori dialects (14, p. 6). * The sound *th* is frequently given instead of *h*.

When the glottal closure is at the beginning, and sometimes when it is in the middle of a word, an added breath is introduced before the succeeding vowel, giving a sound of *i* consonant. This is repre-

* Numbers in parentheses refer to Literature Cited, p. 49.